



2.5 EMERY PARK

DESCRIPTION

Emery Park is one of the oldest 5 Parks in the County System, being acquired back in 1925. This 490-acre “Heritage” park is a general multi-purpose recreation facility, however much of the park is wooded and left to passive recreational pursuits. Two of the most notable features in Emery Park are the old Emery Inn (now vacant and in disrepair) and a ski-slope. A major ravine cuts through the park from the southwest to northeast corners of the park, which helps to define the park’s impressive sloping topography and rugged, natural character. This tributary flows into Cazenovia Creek, which cuts through the northeastern corner of the park property. The northeast section is an undeveloped forested area which is a natural buffer against the acoustical and visual problems associated with the adjacent Route 400 (a four-lane expressway).

The Richardson Cottage, a well-known picnic site, is located on the opposite side of Cazenovia Creek, and is accessed separately off of the Route 400 / NY16 split. The natural character of Emery Park is some of the County System’s most beautiful and finest.

PARK AND AREA HISTORY

The old Emery Inn and the nearby barn structures are reminiscent of days gone by. These structures, and 175 acres of land in the park, are remnants of the original Josiah Emery Farmstead. The Emery family lived on and worked on this land for over one hundred years since the early 1800s. In 1925, the Parks Commission of Erie County purchased the land from Helen B. Emery, forming Emery Park. Many of the original park structures and features still remain from the early development years of the late 20s and early 30s when WPA crews worked to establish this unique park. The historic Emery home was converted to a museum and restaurant after 1926, and in more recent years has unfortunately fallen into disrepair. It now sits vacant. Emery Park has evolved into a 490-acre park of unmatched natural beauty.

LOCAL CONTEXT

Emery Park is located in the Town of Aurora adjacent to the hamlet of South Wales. It is located approximately 18 miles south of Downtown Buffalo and is just a few miles south of the Village of

EXISTING PARK FEATURES AND FACILITIES

- Historic Emery Inn (now vacant)
- Rock Garden
- 7 comfort stations (approx. 1 closed / abandoned)
- Approx. 45 shelters
- 1 ski slope and T-Bar
- Ski Lodge
- Ice Skating rink and Stohrer Lodge Comfort Station (Warming Hut)
- Shuffleboard Courts
- 2 Informal Baseball area (with backstops)
- 6 Baseball Diamonds
- Field House
- Maintenance complex
- Tennis Courts
- Historic Pergola / formal garden area (behind Emery Inn)
- Greenhouse
- Richardson Cottage

East Aurora. The area surrounding Emery Park is largely rural in character with only a scattering of residences throughout the countryside, with the exception of the thickly settled hamlet of South Wales. One of the area’s notable institutions, the Gow School, is only a short walk away from the park. The Park is easily accessed from the end of the Route 400 Expressway where it transitions to Route 16 in South Wales. Direct access to the park is via Emery Road, which bisects the park in an east-west direction.

RECREATIONAL CONTEXT

Emery Park is situated in a relatively rural setting, with few other recreational facilities around. However, given the low population in the area, the recreational demand is not as high as the more urban facilities, and much of the focus of Emery Park has remained passive in nature.

CURRENT ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

- *The park is showing deterioration in its older, historic stone structures*
- *There is a lack of directional and interpretive signage highlighting the wonderful park structures and natural features*
- *As resources and funding dwindle, a new strategy for lawn mowing needs to emerge. Currently, most of the open space in the park is mowed, including areas that are beyond the recreational use areas.*
- *Better linkages should be made within the park between the northern and southern sections of the park*
- *There is an apparent underutilization of some of the park facilities,*
- *There are numerous outdated play structures that do not meet current safety or accessibility codes.*

RECENT PARKS DEPARTMENT PROJECTS / IMPROVEMENTS

- *Improvements to Maintenance Building*
- *New roofing, lighting repairs, septic system replacement and levelskating pond area at Stohrer’s Lodge (2003)*
- *Repairs to Field House (2003)*
- *Repairs to Richardson Cottage (2003)*
- *Repairs to Ski Lodge (2003)*

NEARBY PARKS WITH UNIQUE FEATURES
(WITHIN A 5-MILE RADIUS)

Town of Aurora:

- J.P. Nicely Memorial, West Falls
Lighted tennis courts and sand volleyball courts
- West Falls Dam Site Park
- Aurora Town Park

Village of East Aurora:

- Hamlin Park
Includes a rotary bandstand and a quarter-mile running track
- Hawk Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
Educational programs available
- Sinking Pond Wildlife Sanctuary
- Knox Farm State Park

Town of Wales:

- Kenneglenn Scenic and Nature Preserve
A 130 acre private nature preserve

- Roof repairs to all shelters, install park style grills at all shelters, repair all driveways and repair or replace picnic tables. Also repair all horseshoe pits.
- Paint interior and exterior of all comfort stations. Make some other needed repairs.
- Remove and/or repair playground equipment where needed.
- Repair Pond and fountain at the Japanese Garden.
- New Tennis Court nets and resurfacing.
- Installed new roof at Superintendent's House

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Preserve and enhance "Heritage" Areas and special park features, including historic Emery Inn area with pergola and gardens, Old Rock Garden, etc. Restore historic stone structures, shelters, buildings and stone arch bridge; Preserve and restore old amphitheater, stone gateways, steps and bridges, old stone incinerators, etc.*
 - Restore old stone picnic shelters and structures before building new picnic shelters and structures. (Consider the heritage "value" of these old park features for future tourism and visitor appreciation). Consider the entire park for eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places, with special emphasis on the Emery Inn as the Park's centerpiece.
- *Continue restoration measures to stop the deterioration/ degradation of the historic Emery Inn (Judge Emery Homestead/Farm). Identify potential adaptive re-use for the historic structure that compliments the heritage park uses; Consider a public/private partnership to make this happen. Once fully restored, the Emery Inn could serve as a symbol and inspiration for the entire "RENEWAL" efforts for the Erie County Parks System and for other restoration efforts throughout the region.*
 - Restoration/rehabilitation efforts could re-establish the Inn as a restaurant, with additional uses as a meeting facility, banquet facility for weddings and special events, etc.
 - The entire structure should be decorated with "period" furnishings, similar to that of the Asa Ransom House and other area, "old home" Fine-Dining establishments. This authentic restoration could provide a "museum-like" setting, with photos and documents of the park's history, the earlier history of the Emery Homestead and

hamlet of South Wales, etc. A small gift shop could be provided to sell local park-related items, maps, etc.

- *Other park facilities, i.e. the Stohrer Lodge (skating facility) and Ski Lodge, should be considered (and improved if necessary) for additional “off-season” uses throughout the year. This could include renting either facility in the summer for large meetings, parties or other events that may be conducive to the beautiful park setting and location.*
- *Consider the safety conditions at the existing ski facility; in the future transition the existing ski hill into a snow-board and tobogganing / sledding facility. Future safety improvements may be needed to provide the optimal conditions for these desirable winter activities.*
- *Improve safety along northerly gorge/ravine trail system, i.e. setbacks and permanent railings. Provide new scenic overlook at falls;*
- *Improve and enhance nature trail system throughout the park with new interpretive signage and new trail connections, including providing a looped trail near the ski lodge and future connection to South Wales (future pedestrian bridge over Cazenovia Creek?). Provide new park benches along the nature trails in strategic locations.)*
- *Enhance viewing opportunities to many of Emery Park’s scenic, historic and natural features, including the impressive ravines and remote rugged terrain. Provide new “strategically-placed” overlook platforms and viewing areas to these features with adequate methods of pedestrian safety to give the park more exposure to the public.*
 - Provide ADA access wherever possible to important and scenic vista locations.
- *Establish a stronger linkage between Emery Park and the hamlet of South Wales, including the Gow School, through new sidewalks and/or trails, streetscape enhancements, wayfinding signage, maps, etc.; Provide clear linkages from Emery Park to area bicycle routes and trails.*
- *Better define the park boundaries along Emery Road, Lewis Road and Cornwall Road. Establish more dominant gateways into the park from Emery Road.*

- *Undertake roadway repairs and repaving throughout the park. Improve ditches and culverts wherever necessary.*
- *Although Emery Road cuts the park in half, establish a smoother, “seamless” transition between the north side and the south side of the park. Pedestrian trails should link across the road in a visible and safe fashion, and “traffic-calming” measures should be considered for traffic along Emery Road.*
- *Improve or replace fences along Emery Road - Repair or replace entrance gates.*
- *Provide new interpretive signage and informational kiosks that tie the park better “into the mix” with other local cultural and historical attractions.*
 - *Provide a interpretive “story-line” for the Park’s geological and post-settlement history, i.e. How and when the ravines were formed?; When was the area first settled?; What’s the history behind the Emery Inn and the farm structures? What were some significant historic happenings in the area, or in the park?; When were the old stone structures built?; etc.*
 - *Provide interpretive signs or markers at key historic and natural sites, such as at the Inn, waterfalls, certain stone structures, etc.*
- *Consider a “Corporate Sponsorship” program which encourages local businesses to get more involved with Emery Park, including sponsoring certain events, restoring older facilities and park features, setting up an interpretive signage program, etc.*
- *Improve fishing access and opportunities to the edge of Cazenovia Creek and possibly the old park reservoir.*
- *Reduce lawn mowing to provide more natural setting in non-use, little-trafficked areas, and help to shift park maintenance towards restoring older park structures. One significant area to begin the naturalization process would be west of the Maintenance facilities behind the tennis courts.*
- *Provide new tree plantings throughout the park, particularly along the perimeter buffer areas.*
- *For much of the park’s natural areas, utilize the guidelines established for “CONSERVATION PARKS” under this master plan process. This would ensure a sustainable environment in these areas and native*

habitat protection for local wildlife.

- *Improve playground facilities throughout the park. Remove and replace oldest, non-compliant structures with newer equipment. Consider earthtone colors in the Heritage park setting rather than bright, primary colors.*
- *Improve and enhance the skating opportunities in the park at the Stohrer Lodge. Consider providing a more reliable skating surface, i.e. cooling system, in the future if funding is available and the demand for skating improvements exist.*
- *For abandoned roadways, remove existing blacktop surface and replace with natural landscaping treatments.*
- *Strengthen the relationship between the Parks Department and the Friends of Emery Park, to insure a successful future for the park. Increased attention and excitement within the park by the introduction of volunteer help will hopefully increase attendance and increase the demand for more capital spending on restoring the park, which will lead to further work opportunities.*
 - *Volunteers, such as the Friends of Emery Park, local school groups, boy or girl scouts, garden clubs, or others could be very beneficial to such efforts as restoring the old pergolas and formal gardens, creating an interpretive signage system, etc. A newly restored garden setting near the Emery Inn would be ideal for wedding photos, special events and other appropriate functions.*

THIS PAGE LEFT INTENTIONALLY BLANK

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES / PARK SPECIFIC ACTIONS

PRIORITY KEY

- S Short Term *(1 - 3 years)*
- M Mid Term *(4 - 10 years)*
- L Long Term *(11 - 20+ years)*
- O Ongoing *(Continuing Efforts each year)*